

## **California's Oil Regulator to Review Underground Injection Control Program**

### *Review of Permits, Approval Practices, and Program Rules*

SACRAMENTO – The Division of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources (DOGGR) today announced steps to review the state's Underground Injection Control (UIC) Program. DOGGR is conducting the review in conjunction with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA.) The review examines both specific, previously approved UIC wells and projects as well as the underlying UIC program provisions. The review is to ensure that the approvals meet UIC standards, designed to prevent waste water associated with oil production from being injected into aquifers containing water suitable for human or agricultural use.

In addition, the Division is reviewing current approval practices and, where appropriate, will make revisions to ensure that they are consistent throughout the state. The U.S. EPA maintains a list of aquifers into which waste water can be injected; those typically have natural poor-quality water and/or are associated with hydrocarbon deposits and are known as "exempt" aquifers. Any current DOGGR permitting practice that could result in the approval of injection into a non-exempt zone will cease.

The Division is also reviewing the underlying UIC program rules. Revisions will be considered during this phase of the review process, which is expected to take 12-18 months to complete.

The announcement comes after DOGGR issued orders last month to 7 oil production companies to immediately shut down 11 (of over 1,500 in California) waste water disposal wells to avoid potential harm to a limited number of groundwater aquifers in Kern County. The orders were issued after DOGGR discovered that the waste water disposal wells appeared to be injecting into protected sources of groundwater. The disposal permits suspended may have allowed injection into aquifers that do not appear to have received the necessary designation from the U.S. EPA.

"We shut these wells down and ordered the operators to provide information and conduct testing to ensure human and environmental health and safety is not at risk," said Steve Bohlen, State Oil and Gas Supervisor and head of DOGGR.

Since the initial orders were issued, two of the 11 wells have been authorized to resume operations following Division review. DOGGR, the State Water Resources Control Board, and the California Environmental Protection Agency, and the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board are working closely with the Department of Public Health to ensure waste water injection will not contaminate water wells.

DOGGR has primary authority under the federal Safe Drinking Water Act to regulate underground

injection wells related to oil and gas operations in California, granted by the U.S. EPA. In conjunction with DOGGR, U.S. EPA simultaneously is reviewing the California UIC program. The results of the DOGGR and U.S. EPA review will guide future changes in the state's UIC program.

“In response to a U.S. EPA-commissioned 2011 audit of DOGGR's UIC Program, we have committed to a review and revision of the UIC program, as necessary,” said Jason Marshall, Chief Deputy Director of the California Department of Conservation, of which DOGGR is a part. “The UIC Primacy Agreement is now over 30 years old and there are many changes in industry practices and technology that merit inclusion in any revision of UIC regulations,” Marshall added.

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